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Sex Role Orientations, Attributions for Achievement, and Personal Goals of Chinese Youth[1]

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The role of women in the People's Republic of China has changed dramatically in the last 40 years. This study assesses what impact these changes have had on the attitudes of Chinese youth. The sample consisted of 164 subjects (77 men and 87 women) who completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Objective Fear of Success Measure, a locus of control scale, and a personal goals questionnaire. They also evaluated a painting attributed to artists of different gender and status. The results indicate that the sex role orientations of Chinese students were similar to those of American students. On the Bem inventory, the direction of the sex differences on the sex role scales was the same for U.S. and Chinese students, but the latter had a sex role orientation that, in our culture, is regarded as more "traditional." Chinese women were significantly more likely to endorse statements expressing fear of success than were Chinese men. On the locus of control measures, Chinese women were more likely than men to attribute their achievement successes to luck and failures to a lack of ability. The women students also attributed affiliation outcomes more to luck than did the men. The most important personal goal cited by both men and women was that of career success. Chinese men placed greater importance than women on achieving wealth,

[1]All the personality tests were administered by the first author, a young Chinese-American male teacher, who gave instructions in Chinese.

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and their expectancy of actually becoming wealthy was higher. Finally, in an evaluation of a painting, Chinese men, but not the women, devalued a painting when it was supposedly the work of a female student artist.

In the past 40 years, the role of women in Chinese society has changed from a position of servitude to a position closer to equality with men. In recent years, increasing numbers of women have received a college education. Moreover, with the move to decentralize China's economy, women have found more employment opportunities in small industries, ranging from community-run factories to self-employed businesses (Fu, 1984).

Despite the gains made by Chinese women, their emancipation is far from complete. According to Walstedt (1978), "nonconscious sexism" is still prevalent throughout Chinese culture. Chinese movies, television, and literature continue to stereotype the sexes along traditional lines. Discrimination most frequently occurs in jobs that confer power. As a result, few women hold positions of leadership in Chinese politics, industry, or education.

Another problem Chinese women face are the personal conflicts associated with taking on contrastereotypical roles. The experience of Western countries suggests that as external barriers are removed, internal psychological barriers and negative social consequences often prevent women from achieving.

Traditionally, Chinese men marry women who are less educated or who hold a less prestigious job than they themselves. By the Chinese government's own admission, this "feudal" attitude is still alive and well among men. In a "random" survey conducted in Canton, not one of the male college graduates who responded wanted to marry someone who had the same level of education as himself (Cao, 1984).

The present study, conducted with the cooperation of Chinese educators in 1985, examines gender differences in sex role perceptions, attributions for success and failure, "fear of success," and goal setting among Chinese college students by means of personality tests. We also wanted to determine what young, well-educated Chinese women think of themselves, as well as how they are viewed by their male counterparts. We explored these questions by using a procedure similar to that first used by Goldberg (1968), and subsequently by Pheterson, Kiesler, and Goldberg (1971), and Mischel (1974), among others. Goldberg (1968) asked American college women to rate identical articles attributed to a male or a female author. Female students gave higher ratings to article ostensibly written by male authors than to those attributed to female authors. Goldberg concluded that American women tend to view works produced by their own gender less favorably because they view women as less competent than men. We employed a similar procedure to examine the sex bias of Chinese students. We used Chinese art because this

field has traditionally been dominated by men, with more women becoming artists in recent years. Moreover, the students, who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, never received any formal education in art, and thus their evaluation would more likely be influenced by the supposed gender and status of the painter. We predicted that both men and women who were told the painting was by a female student artist would give the painting lower ratings than those who were led to believe the painting was by a male student artist. However, when the artist was identified as "famous," we expected no sex differences; that is, we predicted that the students would give a painting by a "famous artist" high ratings, regardless of the painter's sex.

METHOD

Methodological Issues

There are several problems inherent in administering Western paper and pencil tests to Chinese students. Our first concern was one of translation. In the process of translating the tests into Chinese we found certain English words or expressions for which there was no Chinese equivalent. The Bem Sex Role Inventory proved especially difficult because several of the items include words whose meanings differ only slightly from one another, although their English connotations are clearly different (e.g., *Assertive, Dominant,* and *Forceful;* or *Understanding, Sympathetic,* and *Compassionate*). We tried to solve this problem by involving several individuals in the translation process. The initial translation of the tests from English into Chinese was done by a pair of Chinese and American psychologists. The translated tests were then given to an English-teaching faculty member in the Foreign Language Department of Guangxi Teachers University, who was blind to the original English versions, and he retranslated them into English. The English "retranslated" versions were then compared with the original tests. Where discrepancies existed between the two, a fourth translator (also a faculty member of the Foreign Language Department) served as an "umpire" to resolve the differences. The final translated copies were examined by all four translators, and the remaining disagreements were resolved in conference.

A second methodological concern was whether the translated tests would be meaningful to Chinese subjects. Because the tests were designed for Westerners, we faced two problems: (1) whether the Chinese youth would find the context of the tests to be irrelevant to their lives and (2) whether the personal nature of some of the questions might cause some students not to respond honestly. Therefore, prior to administering the inventories, 25 university students were asked to examine the Chinese versions of the scales and to participate in an open-ended interview. In the interview each student

was asked (1) whether (s)he had had personal experience with any of the issues referred to in the scales; (2) whether the subject matter of the questions made him or her feel awkward or uncomfortable; (3) whether (s)he believed other students would answer truthfully, given the promise of anonymity; and (4) to list five personal goals that (s)he hoped to achieve in his or her lifetime. (This last question was unrelated to the first three. It was used to help develop a questionnaire that was later administered to the actual subjects.)

In response to the first question, all of the students stated that they had had at least some personal experience with the issues on the survey, and they judged the tests to be relevant to the lives of Chinese students. Although almost one-third (8) of the students said they felt somewhat uncomfortable with the personal nature of the questions, 22 of the 25 believed Chinese students would answer truthfully, if promised anonymity. The answers given in the interviews largely reassured us that the inventories, despite their shortcomings, would be appropriate to the Chinese students, and that meaningful conclusions could be drawn from their responses. Finally, because these measures were not designed for Chinese subjects, it was necessary to establish reliability. In order to do so, 25 students were asked to retake the personality tests 6 weeks after the first testing session.

Subjects

The subjects were 164 junior- and senior-level students (77 men and 87 women) enrolled at Guangxi Teachers University in Southern China. After graduation, students of this four-year university become teachers in high schools and secondary institutes. Because only about 4% of Chinese high school graduates are admitted to any four-year university, the sample is not at all representative of the general population. The age of the subjects ranged from 18 to 30, with a median age of 21 for both sexes. The students were almost evenly divided with respect to urban vs. rural background. Of the total group, 144 were English majors in the Foreign Language Department, and 20 were students from the Educational Department.

Procedure

The paper and pencil tests were administered in a single session to 10 groups of students, ranging from 10 to 19 subjects in each group. Except for the 20 students from the Education Department, all tests were given during regularly scheduled English classes. At the beginning of the session, students were told their participation was voluntary and those who did not wish

to participate were free to leave at any time during the session. All students were informed that the purpose of the research was to understand some psychological aspects of young Chinese adults. The students were told that they would be asked questions that they probably had not encountered before in school and that the questions might seem somewhat unusual. The students were also assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that their own questions would be welcomed after the session. Each session lasted about 2 hours, with a 10-minute break at the end of the first hour.

Measures

The students completed Chinese translations of the following scales: (1) the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), (2) the Objective Fear of Success Scale (Good & Good, 1973), (3) the Multidimensional–Multiattributional Locus of Control Scale (Lefcourt, Von Baeyer, Ware, & Cox, 1979), (4) an evaluation of a Chinese painting attributed to artists who differed in gender and status, and (5) a personal goals questionnaire.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which classifies respondents as "masculine," "feminine," "androgynous," or "undifferentiated," was used to evaluate the students' sex role perceptions and was scored by the median-split method. The Objective Fear of Success Scale assesses the motive to avoid success by means of a 29-item scale that is dichotomously scored. The Multidimensional-Multiattributional Locus of Control Scale (MMCS) was designed to assess locus of control for achievement and affiliation. This 48-item scale differentiates between stable and unstable attributions, and between internal and external sources of success and failure. The students also completed an evaluation of a Chinese watercolor painting attributed to either a male college student, a female college student, a famous male artist, or a famous female artist. The ratings were based on a 5-item (7-point) scale on which the students expressed how much they liked the painting, its quality, the talent of the artist, its desirability for display in one's home, and what they would pay for it. We randomly assigned each of the 10 groups of subjects to one of the four conditions, subject to the limitation that approximately the same number of students were in each condition. Finally, the students completed a personal goals questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed from interviews with the initial 25 students who had identified five personal goals that they wished to achieve in their lifetime. Six goals were common to their lists. These six goals—career, friendship, marriage, wealth, and fame—were included in the questionnaire, and the students ranked them in order of personal importance and the likelihood that they would achieve each goal. To our surprise, ideological goals such as "promoting socialism,"

"helping the masses," or "serving the motherland" were almost completely missing from the lists of the 25 students we initially interviewed. Perhaps because these students were living in a politically stable period, they either had fewer ideological goals or were more willing to reveal their lack of such goals.

RESULTS

Sex Role Orientation

Chinese men scored significantly higher on the masculine scale of the BSRI, Long Form than on the feminine scale [$t(74) = 4.31, p < .0001$], and the reverse was true for women [$t(85) = 4.17, p < .0001$]. Not surprisingly, Chinese men scored significantly higher than women on the masculine scale [$t(161) = 4.03, p < .0001$] and the women scored significantly higher than their male counterparts on the feminine scale [$t(161) = 7.04, p < .0001$]. These differences are consistent with those obtained by Bem (1981) for her U.S. sample. Of special interest is the fact that the median score on the feminine sex role scale for U.S. male students (4.60) is higher than that of Chinese male students (4.27), just as the median score on the masculine sex role scale for U.S. female students (4.80) is considerably higher than that of Chinese female students (4.32). In other words, although the direction of sex differences on the sex role scales is the same for U.S. and Chinese students, the latter have a sex role orientation that, in the context of our culture, we would describe as more "traditional."

Following Bem's scoring system, Chinese students who scored above the local masculine median but below the feminine median were classified as masculine; students who scored above the feminine median but below the masculine median score were classified as feminine; students scoring above both medians were considered androgynous; and students scoring below both medians were classified as undifferentiated.

Based upon these four sex role categories, almost one-half of the Chinese male students were classified as masculine and only 12% as feminine. Similarly, 50% of the Chinese female students were classified as feminine and only 15% as masculine. Women were slightly more likely than men to be androgynous, and a higher percentage of men than women had undifferentiated sex roles, although neither difference was statistically significant. Although the distribution of Chinese student sex roles is similar to that of American university students, a comparison of our data with those of Bem (1981) reveals that more Chinese than U.S. women were classified as feminine, and Chinese women were less likely than U.S. women to be classified as androgynous.

Fear of Success

On the Objective Fear of Success Scale, Chinese women were significantly more likely to endorse statements expressing fear of success than were Chinese men [$t(157) = 2.71, p < .01$)]. The mean score for Chinese women was 11.8, compared with a mean score for Chinese men of 9.6. (The higher the score on this scale, the greater the tendency to fear success.) Good and Good (1973) report that the mean score for U.S. men and women is significantly different (7.7 for women vs. 6.1 for men). Thus, in both the Chinese and U.S. samples women fear success significantly more than men. However, among Chinese students of both sexes the fear of success is substantially higher than among U.S. students.

Locus of Control

Table I presents the mean scores for each of the subscales on the MMCS. Several sex differences were found on the attributions for achievement measures. Chinese women were more likely than Chinese men to attribute their achievement outcomes to ability [$t(159) = 3.39, p < .001$]. However, they were also more apt than Chinese men to attribute their achievements to luck [$t(159) = 2.31, p < .02$]. This apparent contradiction was resolved when we examined the smaller 3-item subscales that are not presented in Table I. Women were more apt to attribute their successes to luck [$t(159) = 2.29, p < .02$] and their failures to (lack of) ability than were men [$t(159) = 3.89, p < .001$]. Although women attributed more importance to both ability and

Table I. Mean Scores of Chinese and Canadian University Students on the Multidimensional-Multiattributional Locus of Control Achievement and Affiliation Subscales

	Achievement[a]		Affiliation[a]	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Ability	9.3[e]	12.7	16.0	16.9
Effort	20.4	20.4	18.0	17.9
Context	8.4	7.7	14.4	15.0
Luck	5.7[c]	7.9	11.1[d]	14.1
Internality	29.7[d]	33.0	34.0	34.8
Externality	14.0	15.6	25.5[d]	29.1
Success[b]	13.5	14.0	20.0	21.1
Failure[b]	19.0[c]	16.4	19.9	21.9
Total	32.4	30.4	39.9	42.8

[a]The higher the score, the greater the attribution.
[b]The higher the score, the more external the attribution.
[c]$p < .05$.
[d]$p < .01$.
[e]$p < .001$.

luck, the importance given to each factor varied with the achievement outcome. This interpretation is further supported by the sex differences on the achievement failure measures, with men more likely to attribute failures in achievement to external sources [$t(159) = 2.33$, $p < .02$]. Finally, women scored higher on the internality scale than men [$t(159) = 2.67$, $p < .01$]. With some interesting exceptions, these results are similar to those for a Canadian sample tested by Lefcourt et al. (1979). Canadian men and women were more likely than the Chinese to attribute their achievements to ability or lack of ability, and were even more likely than the Chinese to attribute their achievements to good or bad luck. Canadian scores on the smaller (3-item) subscales not included in Table I reveal sex differences in ability and effort attributions for failures. Canadian women were significantly more apt to attribute failure to (lack of) ability than were men, whereas Canadian men attributed such failures to (poor) effort more often than women.

Only two sex differences were found in the Chinese sample on the affiliation measures in the MMCS. Chinese women were more likely than men to attribute affiliation outcomes to luck [$t(159) = 3.28$, $p = .001$] and to other external factors [$t(159) = 2.89$, $p < .01$]. Canadian men and women were far less likely than the Chinese to attribute affiliation outcomes to luck. To the extent that Canadian students did so, it occurred more often in men than in women.

Evaluation of Painting

The painting evaluation data were analyzed by means of a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analysis of variance (sex of the subject, sex of the artist, and status of the artist).

Subjects were asked to rate the painting on a scale from 1 to 7 in response to five questions, with 7 being the most favorable rating. Table II shows the total mean scores (of the 5 items) given by subjects across all eight conditions. An omnibus analysis revealed significant differences between the conditions [$F(1, 155) = 15.3$, $p < .001$]; however, no interaction effects were found. There was a significant main effect for the sex of the subject. Female students across all conditions assigned higher ratings to the painting than did male students [female mean score: 24.5; male mean score: 21.1; $F(1, 155) = 9.8$, $p = .002$]. A second main effect was the status of the artist. Students rated a painting attributed to a famous artist more favorably, regardless of their own gender or that of the artist, than they rated the same painting when attributed to a student artist. No differences were found in the ratings by men and women when the painting was attributed to a male student artist. However, in a planned pairwise comparison, we found that male subjects gave significantly lower ratings to the female student artist than

Table II. Mean Evaluation Scores Assigned by Chinese University Students to a Painting Attributed to Artists Varying in Gender and Status

Condition	*N*	Mean evaluation score[a]
Male subject/famous female artist	14	23.9
Female subject/famous female artist	20	27.6
Male subject/female student artist	21	18.7
Female subject/female student artist	24	23.2
Male subject/famous male artist	20	23.8
Female subject/famous male artist	16	25.8
Male subject/male student artist	22	19.0
Female subject/male student artist	26	22.6

[a]The mean evaluation score reflects the average rating based upon a 5-item, 7-point rating scale. The highest possible score was 35; the lowest possible score was 5. Thus, the higher the score, the more favorable the evaluation.

did the female subjects [$t(43) = 2.13, p < .04$]. It would have been interesting to determine whether the sex bias found in Chinese men was attributable mainly to those who had been classified by the BSRI as having a masculine sex role orientation. Unfortunately, the sample size was too small to permit a meaningful answer to this question.

Personal Goals

Table III presents the mean rankings that the Chinese students gave to six personal goals, first in order of their importance (6 being the highest ranking) and then in the order of how likely it was that they could achieve these goals. The responses were analyzed by means of a 2 × 2 × 2 ANOVA (sex of subject, importance vs. likelihood, and mean ranking). An omnibus analysis showed that there were significant differences between conditions [$F(1, 140) = 193.05, p < .0001$]. However, no interaction or main effects were found. Both male and female students identified a successful career as their top priority (mean ranking of 5.2 and 5.1, respectively), followed by good friendships and a happy marriage (rated as 3.8 and 3.7, respectively). Women ranked personal fame and men listed becoming wealthy as their fourth most important goal. Both sexes placed being a good parent in sixth

Table III. Mean Ranking by Chinese University Students of the Importance of Personal Goals and the Likelihood of Achieving Them

	Males	Females
Importance of goals[a]		
Successful career	5.2	5.1
Good friendships	3.9	3.9
Happy marriage	3.8	3.8
Becoming wealthy	3.1	2.4[c]
Achieving fame	2.9	3.3[c]
Being a good parent	2.0	2.3
Likelihood of achieving goals[b]		
Good friendships	4.3	4.1
Successful career	4.3	4.2
Happy marriage	3.6	3.8
Becoming wealthy	3.4	2.7[d]
Being a good parent	2.7	3.1
Achieving fame	2.7	3.0

[a]Ranked 1–6, with 6 most important and 1 least important.
[b]Ranked 1–6, with 6 most likely and 1 least likely.
[c]$p < .02$.
[d]$p < .01$.

place. Men attached greater importance to wealth than did women ($p < .02$), and the men were more confident than the women that they would actually achieve their goal of become wealthy ($p < .01$).

When asked to rank the same six goals in terms of their likelihood of achieving them, both men and women ranked the goals in roughly the same order.

Reliability

In order to establish test-retest reliability, 25 Chinese students were asked to retake the BSRI, the Objective Fear of Success Scale, and the MMCS 6 weeks after the first testing session. The test-retest Spearman-Brown correlation was $r = .81$ for the masculine scale and $r = .79$ for the feminine scale of the BSRI, and $r = .80$ for the Objective Fear of Success Scale. The retest reliability for the MMCS ($n = 23$) was considerably lower, with $r = .41$ for the total achievement scale and $r = .39$ for the total affiliation scale. The retest reliabilities were substantially lower than those reported for North American samples (test-retest reliabilities ranged from $r = .61$ to $r = .79$; Lefcourt et al., 1979). One possible explanation is that the Chinese students were under great stress at the time when the tests were readministered. The students had just completed their final examinations and most of them were graduating seniors waiting to learn about their job assignments. Many reported feeling helpless because they could do nothing to influence their job as-

signment. Increasingly, this is reflected in the fact that when the tests were readministered, the students obtained higher external locus of control scores on both the achievement and affiliation scales. Nevertheless, until further MMCS measures are administered to Chinese subjects, any conclusions about their attributions for success and failure must be tentative.

DISCUSSION

It is important to bear in mind the preliminary nature of our study and its limitations. First, all but one of the measures we used were developed in the United States and have not been validated in China. As one example, the BSRI may or may not adequately assess significant features of sex roles in China. Second, we compared very culturally diverse groups (Chinese vs. American and Canadian university students) and noted certain similarities (as well as differences) in their questionnaire responses. Because these comparison groups undoubtedly differ in many unknown but important respects, any conclusions drawn regarding these similarities must necessarily be very tentative.

Despite great cultural differences, the sex role orientations of Chinese and U.S. university students appear remarkably similar. We found that although both Chinese men and women have a sex role orientation, as measured by the BSRI, which we in the West would characterize as more traditional, the direction of the sex differences is similar for U.S. and Chinese students. Chinese women are also more likely than men to attribute their successes to luck and their failures to lack of ability. These results are very similar to those obtained in American studies showing that U.S. women are more likely to attribute their failures to poor ability than are men, whereas men are more likely to attribute their failures to external circumstances. Conversely, both Chinese and U.S. women (Dweck & Bush, 1976) are more likely to attribute their successes to luck than are men.

That educated Chinese youths have not yet fully embraced equalitarian governmental policies is indicated in our finding that Chinese women scored higher on the fear of success measure than did the men. This undoubtedly reflects a realistic recognition in both Chinese and U.S. societies that to be a successful woman means that others, especially men, may find one less attractive. Additional evidence of sex bias among well-educated Chinese men was found in their evaluation of a painting attributed to artists of different gender. Unless the artist was famous, the gender of the artist determined how favorably a work of art was assessed by Chinese men (but not by Chinese women). Just as in the United States, it is quite likely that the work of women is devalued by Chinese men in many other spheres as well. Our results

are consistent with the finding of Pheterson et al. (1971) that there is no differential evaluation of a painting as a function of the gender of the artist when the painting is attributed to a contest "winner" (vs. a contest "entrant"). However, we did not find that Chinese women negatively evaluated work attributed to women, contrary to Goldberg (1968), Pheterson et al. (1971), Feldman-Summers and Kiesler (1974), Mischel (1974), and Paludi and Bauer (1983), all of whom tested U.S. samples.

The most important personal goal cited by our sample of Chinese men and women was that of career success, and their expectancy of success was very high. Surprisingly, the women were as optimistic about their chances for a successful career as the men. Perhaps this reflects the fact that only a very small percentage of high school graduates are admitted to universities. Being members of an elite group may generate the belief that their future will repeat their past. It is also interesting to note the relatively low importance both men and women gave to achieving a happy marriage and being a good parent. The goal of having a good marriage was less important than friendship and career goals, while parenthood was listed as the lowest of the six priorities. These findings are surprising in light of the importance of the family in Chinese society. It is difficult to determine whether these relatively low rankings are due to a change in attitudes toward the family among youths, or whether these university students were simply more preoccupied with other goals at that stage in their lives. Further research is needed to clarify this question. Finally, male students attributed greater importance and greater probability of achieving wealth than the women students. This difference suggests that young men may be more likely and more able than young women to take advantage of China's economic reforms—with their emphasis on decentralization, economic creativity, and generating wealth—to further their own careers.

To what extent do feminine sex role orientations, unwillingness to take credit for success, and fear of success help maintain the unequal achievement of Chinese women today? What changes in self-attitudes can be expected for Chinese women in the future? Governmental policies in support of equality of the sexes have helped reshape attitudes in both men and women, at least among the educated. Current Chinese leaders, however, have placed economic growth ahead of all social goals, and reforms aimed at promoting sex equality have all but disappeared from their political agenda.

The best jobs offered in China's modernization program are in engineering, computers, and management, areas in which men dominate. In addition, the one-child family policy—a prerequisite for attaining China's economic goals—also presents a barrier toward more equalitarian sex role attitudes. The policy appears to have intensified the greater value attached to sons than to daughters (Croll, Davin, & Kane, 1985).

The increased practice of infanticide in rural areas (Bullough & Ruan, 1988) highlights the differences in attitudes toward women's equality between the well-educated Chinese and the rural peasantry who make up 80% of the population. Although well-educated youths, as our study illustrates, are beginning to embrace more equalitarian sex role attitudes, peasants undoubtedly have far less equalitarian views, although their attitudes toward sex roles have rarely been assessed (Wolf, 1985). Clearly, our findings, based upon well-educated youths, cannot be generalized to the Chinese population as a whole. Future research should explore the differences in sex role attitudes between well-educated urban youths and less-educated peasants.

Increasing contact between Chinese and Westerners through cultural exchanges, movies, television, and tourism may help narrow the existing differences between Chinese men and women in sex role orientations and attributions for achievement, especially among the young and the well educated. At the same time, we should not overestimate the effects on the Chinese of our changing attitudes and practices toward women. Far more powerful forces, those of economic and political change, are affecting the "unfinished liberation" of Chinese women. These are the forces most likely to produce new sex role orientations, reattributions for achievement, and the fuller realization of personal goals for both men and women.

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